

JACKSON NEWS (MISS.)
29 AUGUST 1979

Satellites Offer Variety of Uses

The use of high-altitude satellites in the United States has many varied uses, secretive as well as public functions, such as observation and broadcast of weather data.

Government intelligence agencies have used high-altitude satellite photography to monitor Soviet missile firings, Chinese troop movements — and “civil disturbances” in the United States.

The use of satellite imagery by the Central Intelligence Agency to spy on domestic disturbances has been a closely held secret until now, because the CIA is legally prohibited from engaging in domestic intelligence operations.

But the Center for National Security Studies, a Washington-based public interest group, recently forced disclosure of a “secret” 1973 CIA memo on “activities possibly outside the CIA’s legislative charter.”

Most of those activities had been revealed in earlier congressional hearings or news accounts, but the classified memo provided new information about the CIA’s National Photo Interpretation Center.

As part of its analysis of satellite photographs, “NPIC has examined domestic coverage for special purposes such as natural catastrophes and civil disturbances,” says the memo.

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